On Performative Cinema. On the Films of Roland Sabatier and Lettrist Anti-Cinema

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Translated by Miranda Stewart

Roland Sabatier, *Le film (n')est (plus) (qu')un souvenir*, 1975

Cinema today serves many new purposes. It is exhibited in galleries and museums, activated in the shape of installations, disseminated on the screens of mobile phones or computers. So what has become of the medium we know as cinema? Is it now a relic of the past, a museum piece, indissolubly bound to its traditional mode of delivery, or has it been able to break free without totally denying its past and negotiate the terms of its metamorphosis through its various avatars? The recent renewal of critical and historiographical interest in expanded cinema is clearly a direct result of this new state of affairs.[1] Just how far can cinema expand and change? Where does the breaking point lie? Jonathan Walley quite rightly noted the paradoxical dual trend toward both expansion and contraction that characterized expanded cinema in the 1970s. The apparent abandonment of cinema's traditional tools, as in *Line Describing a Cone by Anthony McCall* (1973) and *Yellow*

Movies by Tony Conrad (1973), comes from a questioning of the medium's ontological status.[2] Artworks, in their quest to identify the intrinsic nature of cinema, have become sculptural and on occasion purely conceptual, in singular and unforeseen ways. This reflects the views of Pavle Levi who, in his book *Cinema by Other Means,* regards visual work, poetic scenarios, and performances as films in their own right, albeit disassociated from the parameters of the medium.[3] It is interesting to examine the situation of contemporary cinema in light of this twin movement toward expansion and contraction. Cinema of exhibition has migrated from cinema theater to museum, offering its viewers perambulatory tropism, with frequent use of loops and multiple screens and interplay between cinema and art historical references. Is this the dialectical progression of the medium or its negation in pure and simple terms?[4]

In French there are many meanings of the term "*exposition*" (as in *cinéma d'exposition*/"cinema of exhibition"), ranging from geographical orientation (a site can be well or poorly exposed), to human sacrifice (the body is exposed), radiation (exposure to rays). The term is also used rhetorically to refer to the first part of a work where the author presents his or her argument, known in French as *exposition* or sometimes *proposition*. All these meanings can be used to describe the situation of cinema today, marked as it is by a sense of crisis and the loss of aura that came with digital projection.[5] Let us return to the rhetorical sense. The fragmentation of the parameters of the film medium has given rise nowadays to imaginary or conceptual artworks: linguistic utterances replace films, film directors comment on films as they are screened, attention is focused more on the making of the film than on the object itself through the use of background documentation. Cinema of exhibition is currently experiencing its own expansion through new film presentation modes that are more fragile, more restrained, and lower key, and taking forms such as performances, discussions, and the presentation of film fragments or work in progress.[6] Does exhibiting film as if it were an artwork or an utterance constitute a performative act? Is "to exhibit" a performative verb? Film has moved from picture house to museum, become detached from its original cinematographic apparatus and is now subjected to new technical

configurations—is performance its only way forward? It should be noted that the term "performative" has two meanings: one strictly linguistic, following Austin, whereby performative verbs perform their function through the fact of their very utterance,[7] and a second relating more generally to the field of artistic performance. Nowadays, certain artists and film directors can be seen to espouse performative practice, one that lies at the interface between these two meanings. I would like to develop the idea that there can be performative cinema by examining the works of Lettrist artists, and Roland Sabatier in particular, all of whom have no doubt offered their own concise and precise definition of this particular state of affairs. The cinema of Roland Sabatier combines the dematerialization of the artwork and a certain conceptualism through propositions and projects that are not necessarily concerned with completion, but rather make their statement through their means of expression, one that is midway between destruction, negation, and withdrawal.

1. The Situation of Lettrist Cinema

Roland Sabatier belongs to the Lettrist movement. His early works date back to 1963. Along with Maurice Lemaître, he was one of the first artists of this group to develop a consistent oeuvre of film. It is difficult to describe his work without evoking the context of the Lettrist avant-garde, which emerged at the end of World War II under the leadership of Isidore Isou, and looked beyond the aesthetic field toward a general revolution of knowledge. It is worth noting that most analysis and commentary regarding Lettrist cinema was by Lettrist artists themselves, in keeping with the movement's characteristic tendency to develop its own historiography, couched in a distinctive critical language, with copious use of neologisms, and the publication of manifestos and articles in Lettrist books and journals. Following his film *Traité de bave et d'éternité* (*Treatise on Venom and Eternity*) of 1951, Isou published his *Esthétique du cinéma*. Here, he applied a number of original concepts, including the decisive notions of the amplic (*amplique*) and chiseling (*ciselant*)[8] phases. According to Isou, the arts go through two alternating phases: the amplic, characterized by a wealth of stylistic devices and artistic resources, and the chiseling

phase, in which the medium is destroyed and negated by dissociating its elements atom by atom. Cinema, he says, has entered its chiseling phase, hence the Lettrist strategies of destroying it as a medium, by scraping surfaces and creating *discrepancy*, precisely through dissociating image and sound. Isou seeks to develop the powers of the medium after its disappearance, and the feeling of closure that he expresses is striking. "I announce the *destruction of cinema*, the first apocalyptic sign of disjunction, of rupture, of that *swollen and potbellied* organism that is called film," he states in his film. But Lettrist cinema cannot be reduced simply to the chiseling phase and discrepancy. In 1952 Isou published *Amos ou Introduction à la métagraphologie* (*Amos, or Introduction to Metagraphology*), a book described as a "hypergraphic film" comprising photographs with additional signs in gouache. Hypergraphia consists of an amalgam of visual and linguistic signs, which find filmic expression in book form through a combination of writing, photography, and drawings. Film becomes detached from its cinematographic apparatus to take the form of a book or a sequence of photographs.

In his book *Le film est déjà commencé?* (*Has the Film Begun?*), published in 1952, Lemaître describes the actions to be performed by actors during a particular session, establishing a structural link between book, performance and film.[9] Also worth mentioning are two decisive concepts which find productive expression in the work of Sabatier: "imaginary" or "infinitesimal" art, exhibited in 1956 by Isou, who rarefies sense data in pursuit of intangible or mental expression, akin to conceptual art and super-temporal art. Here the artist proposes a simple creative framework that viewers, who have become users, can exploit to extend or even contradict a particular work, one that is not limited in time.[10] It is interesting to note the way in which Lettrist films try to push at the boundaries of their medium, striving to be a "cinema by other means," in the form of books, photo collage, visual arts, sculpture, not to mention performance and debate. "Cinema is dead, and debate must now become the work," Isou wrote in *Esthétique du cinéma* in 1952.[11] "Debate, an adjunct to spectacle, must become the real drama. This is how to overturn the law of precedence."

2. On Subtraction and Negation

Roland Sabatier explored these different lines of critical thought regarding "aesthetic polythanasia," which, in Isou's manifesto, refers to systematic, varied, and complex ways of destroying and negating the artwork.

> In culture especially, and in art more specifically, an *assassination* phase, if it is to be valid, significant, and ever-lasting, must mark the closing down of a *particular* formal system, if not a *specific* formal sector, namely an extremely well-known structure with familiar elements.[12]

The act of liquidation presupposes a logical method, otherwise it is simply a gratuitous act.

> We must replace arbitrary, chaotic, artistic annihilation by *necessary*, *specified*, *multiple* annihilation. Our problem with Malevich's "white page" is that it failed to define the cultural or empirical sectors for which these destructive data are considered to be *ends*.[13]

Roland Sabatier fleshes out his personal research into the "necessary, specified, and multiple annihilation that can account in its negation for the different aesthetic dimensions of the material, its mechanics, rhythm, and themes" in his text *Situation de mes apports dans la polythanasie esthétique* (1967–1974) (*My Current Contribution to Aesthetic Polythanasia*).[14] The artist, adopting an attitude poised between ironic detachment and withdrawal, diligently completed this program with a series of works and deeds designed to "get rid of the work." The work is abstracted from all visibility, destroyed or covered over, evoked but not put into practice, interrupted on the pretext that it is badly painted, quickly painted, a botched job, a rough draft, a fragment, painted without concentration or in disgust, messily painted, a sketch, barely started, half finished, a rough sketch, a memory. And, at the same time, the artist explores anti-aesthetic performance with weariness, rejection, and disdain.

His program operates filmically through films unrealized and forgotten, sketched, described, unfinished,

even destroyed. His cinematographic work effectively strives to suppress or deny the very characteristics of the medium. We can get an idea of what he was attempting to do with cinema if we look at *Œuvres de cinéma (1963–1983)*, a 128-page A4 book, probably photocopied or duplicated, and comprising nothing other than data sheets.[15] Each artwork adopts a standard form, familiar to traditional cinema: original title, date of filming, production, presented in various categories—film format (16 mm, super-8, film/action, video), running time, length (meters), number of reels, silent/sound, black-and-white/color, performers, public certification, and publications. A short description (a script) presents the project. Two items of technical information are not to be found in traditional cinema: "film/action," presented as a possible format, and certification, which reflects the Lettrist insistence on editorial and administrative registration, with a view to establishing the work's historical primacy. The first edition, *Œuvres de cinéma (1964–1978)*, was published in 1978 (with a second edition in 1984). The circumstances of its publication are enlightening. The author, like Maurice Lemaître and Isidore Isou, who obtained their doctorates "for practice-based work" in 1974 and 1976 respectively, was preparing a thesis on "The Internal and External Destruction of art" at the Centre Universitaire de Vincennes under the supervision of André Veinstein.[16] To strengthen his submission, he prepared a first edition of this book in what, he said, was a fairly expeditious manner. *Œuvres de cinéma* was published by Éditions Psi, founded by Sabatier himself in 1963, in order to provide an "independent, flexible editorial framework capable of certifying and disseminating his own works and those of other artists in the Lettrist movement, unbound by any external constraints."[17] This feature is typical of the editorial logic of the Lettrists, who were working to compile archives, and viewed art history as an aesthetic form.[18] Sabatier wanted to use a "cinematographic standard" for this book by choosing a data sheet that would allow him to "separate cinema from visual art." The point was to emphasize the profoundly cinematographic nature of his films, in spite of all appearances to the contrary. Most of his films have no film stock. Sound is made in the theater and running times are indeterminate. Sabatier, writing about Lettrist cinema in general, notes that,

> In fact, these films, with their deluge of things from the past, were, in most cases, unlike what we commonly think of as films, for the cinema that emerges pushes the limits and stands outside cinema. It does that in its quest to be an *alternative cinema*, constantly leading the viewer more toward intellectual adventure than to contemplation.[19]

While it is easy to grasp the idea behind a radical body of work, pushing at the boundaries of the medium through screenings of expanded cinema and performances, the publication of *Œuvres de cinéma* never ceases to surprise. Most of the sheets describe films that were never made, performances that did not take place, projects that were never carried through, set out by way of simple hypotheses, fulfilling the wish expressed by Édouard Levé: "A book describes works conceived by the author, but ones that he did not make."[20] The film's data sheet (the script) has become the film. So are we looking at what might be termed *paper film*?[21] This homemade, self-published book, which above all describes films, the existence of which relies primarily on their linguistic articulation, falls clearly into the performative domain. What status do these data sheets enjoy? Roland Sabatier tends to speak in terms of a project, even if the status of these documents may call to mind other terms: score, instruction, or injunction, for example.

> What people choose to call them is a matter of indifference to me. I never raised this particular problem. Score could also serve as a generic term for project, a synonym for project. What should it be called? A sheet. It brings together all the different components. A kind of guide.[22]

It would seem, however, that the virtual dimension of his films was not entirely premeditated or intended.

> I wished to position myself truly within cinema, and therefore created these films as intellectual concepts. There would be some practical issues to make them, but no one has ever suggested that I show them. Should I have had to show them, I would have

> concentrated more on how to present them without losing their anti-cinema nature.[23]

And as he did not show them, he published them. But was this absence of production fortuitous? Could we not interpret publication as a performative act?

3. Performativity

It is striking that Sabatier's cinema often presupposes a script (an utterance, a text, a series of dialogues) as part of its activation. While some films just contain a simple outline of the project, published as a description in book form, others also invoke a second script to be activated at a cinema screening. Can the technical sheet be interpreted as a performative document?

> In this context, a performative document is a document that does not merely fulfill the act of documenting; instead it transforms the way of being—the ontological status—of the subject documented. It turns an ordinary or extraordinary action into an *artistic* action.[24]

The data sheets published by the artist would appear to have this effect. We can distinguish three types of performativity: a data sheet describes a performance based on a second script, following a simple procedure (*Hommage à Buñuel*, 1970); a data sheet describes a performance based on a performative script in accordance with modes of presentation that are complex, labile, diversified, and capable of existing in multiple versions (*Regarde ma parole qui parle le (du) cinéma*, 1982 [*Look at my Words that Speak (of) Cinema*]); a data sheet is a simple performative utterance accompanied by an editorial strategy (*Le film n'est plus qu'un souvenir*, 1975).

A. "The author tells the audience about the film by briefly describing its sound and image. He then ends by saying: 'I am therefore not going to make this film, but try to imagine what it might have been on the basis of the few clues that I have just given you.'"[25] *Hommage à Buñuel*, "a polythanazed hypergraphic film," was presented by

the author at the Cinémathèque Française on April 23, 1970. This simple description presupposes a second script, read by the author to the public, describing the imaginary work that should have been projected. This was a "hypergraphic film" that combined different kinds of writing and visual signs forming a rebus.

> As a further example, another image shows a portrait of the maker of this film looking viewers in the eye *(je)* [I] ... / Against a black ground, the syllables "PEN" and "SE" (*pense* [think]) ... immediately completed by an / Image in line with the tail of a cow (*Je pense que/Je pense queue* [I think that/I think tail]) ... / As we saw earlier, this is simply an example to give you an idea of the idea behind the film.[26]

The text read by the artist ends with the following words:

> By now, you know as much about the film as its maker, and since the latter is not inclined to transfer it to film, he asks you to accompany him and enter into the further originality of non-realization and imagine, as he himself does at certain moments in his life, what this film might have been, based on the clues that he has just given you. This film will therefore remain as it is, hanging from the lips of Roland Sabatier, its producer, forever!

The technical data sheet describes a performance that is itself performative, which activates the film through its linguistic utterance in accordance with the principles of imaginary or infinitesimal art.

B. Let us now consider a more complex work, *Regarde ma parole qui parle le (du) cinéma*, from 1982. The film script comprises a sound section comprising a recital of technical terms ("close-up, middle shot, close-medium shot ... "), and a visual section that relates a narrative using free indirect speech.

> A man, no doubt sitting at a café terrace, who later turns out to be a filmmaker, perhaps even the author himself, speaks, as if giving his personal thoughts

> about the general and specific problems besetting innovative cinema.[27]

There will be references to classic films from the history of cinema in this reflection on the power of the medium. The film plays on the inverse relationship between saying and showing.

> Behold my words that speak of cinema, and you shall see my film. While the images that comprise the cinema element will be available in spoken form, the words talking about cinema will be shown as film.[28]

The sound track, according to the instructions given for visual effects, is to be recorded and played in the theater at the same time as the text is read by the viewer. It can be reproduced on film or on slides, or printed in a booklet and handed out to the audience. "Originally, I wanted parts of the text to appear on the screen and for a voice to speak technical terms such as close-up, etc. I had to abandon that approach," the artist admitted.[29] As a result, the work has been through many different versions: graphite drawings, text printed on cards, photographs on slides and film. While the author was preparing a version for the International Avant-Garde festival in November 1983, the laboratory lost the roll of photographs. A replacement version shows fragments of filmed text, but technical problems render the text illegible. A final DVD version in 1996 includes printed inserts and photographs excerpted from films cited in the film, and the text on the sound track is read by the author. The lability of the different versions underscores the performative nature of the script, as if any difficulties encountered in presenting the film itself, leaving aside unfortunate circumstances and technical accidents, were an intrinsic part of the work. "He believed that all he had to do was say 'cinema' for it to be a film, or nearly a film. 'CINÉMA', and above all 'almost' are the words that best encapsulate the originality of the film."[30] The work evokes the register of the almost by developing the notion of "not," of virtuality, tenuousness and unobservability, thereby recalling the figure of Bartleby.[31] *Quasi-cinema*, in the words of Helio Oiticica.[32] How far can cinema remain itself while

destroying its own constituents? Can its definition proceed via negation and subtraction? "There is no doubt that a film can be fully defined by the words used to describe it" according to Sabatier.[33]

C. A final example: *Le film n'est plus qu'un souvenir*, from 1975, a "polythanazed film" of variable duration, with no film stock and with various documents and accessories. I quote from the data sheet:

> The author steps toward the public and, sheepishly, announces that he has made a chiseling film, but that this film has just been destroyed and therefore cannot be screened. He ends up offering to replace it with a number of documents bearing witness to its past existence. The new film, which is never named as such, can be found in allusions to the films it is replacing and is reflected in the confused and awkward manner in which various elements (tools, studio photographs, bits of leftover film stock, etc., not to mention counterfeit press cuttings of comments and reviews) are shown. According to the artist, these are all elements related to the absent film or ones that have served to make it.[34]

The performance described was never activated. It exists only as an illocution in *Œuvres de cinéma*. And yet documents exist for this film, notably a photograph which is often reproduced in catalogues, and is captioned "The film is no more than a memory," showing movie accessories (film reel, projector, director's chair, camera, tripod).[35] It could almost be a photograph of a public exhibition, and yet it is actually a photo taken by the artist in his studio in Aubervilliers. For Sabatier, there is virtually no difference. The only thing that matters is the artwork and its date of certification. But can this be seen as a performative photograph that brings a work into existence by laying a trail of false clues that act as fictional triggers? In this respect, the technical data sheet is a paradoxical performative utterance because the film is forever withheld from any kind of visibility. No doubt the data sheet itself raises an element of doubt over the nature of these artworks, poised as they are between the linguistic utterance and its potential activation.

4. On Performativity and Failure

Let us consider another facet of the artist's activity that clarifies what he understands as performativity. This is his use of propositions, more frequently referred to as "injunctions," comprising short utterances describing attitudes and actions designed to "elicit from the interlocutor appropriate mental representations, deeds, and behaviours."[36] Take, for example, "Respirez. Tous les composants de cette œuvre sont contenus dans votre respiration (œuvre infinitésimale et supertemporelle)" (Breathe. All the components of this work are contained in your breathing (infinitesimal and super-temporal work), (1968), and "Soyez discret. Œuvre d'humilité esthétique" (Be discreet. Work of aesthetic humility), (1969). These injunctions are written on the pages of a book of graph paper, a facsimile of which is reproduced in chronological order in his book *Œuvres infinitésimales et supertemporelles, injonctions, faits, comportements*, published in 1984.

> In this natural state, these works, with these accessible data showing how they operate and are notated, are "scores" that contain within themselves the countless potential of internalized beauties, which will flower in multiple future "performances."[37]

They are, he wrote,

> open to the future, stretching beyond time to grow, contradict themselves, change, and yet never reach completion, continually absorbing the values of the times, gaining in profile through the actions of all sectors of the public, through the contribution that this very time offers them.[38]

Some of these instructions can also be found in *Œuvres de cinéma*, such as *Respirez*: "The film consists of handing out pieces of paper with the words 'Breathe. The film is your breathing' written on them."[39] Is this a performative? No doubt it is insofar as Austin draws a distinction between explicit performatives, for instance the performative verbs to "bet," "promise," or "bequeath," and implicit performatives.

> But, of course, it is both obvious and important that we can on occasion use the utterance "go" to achieve practically the same as we achieve by the utterance "I order you to go" … It may, however, be uncertain in fact, and, so far as the mere utterance is concerned, is always left uncertain when we use so inexplicit a formula as the mere imperative "go," whether the utterer is ordering (or is purporting to order) me to go or merely advising, entreating, or what not me to go.[40]

It is precisely this interplay between the explicit and the implicit that lies at the heart of Roland Sabatier's films. Furthermore, a number of these injunctions use the imperative form, while others take the form of signatures. "From this day on, I SIGN all *voluntary* (demolition, sabotage, etc.) and *involuntary forms of destruction* (fires, collapse, etc.) of houses and buildings throughout the world as works of architectural polythanasia, or works of anti-architecture" (July 1969), or in a more scriptural register, "From this day on, I SIGN, beyond their usual meanings, practices, all (voluntary or involuntary) traces inscribed on all snows in the world, as symbols in relief of various supra-temporal chapters of an ephemeral sculpted prose or a work of ephemeral architecture or a work of fleeting architecture, entitled: white traces (19 July 1969)." We are aware of the ambiguous, complex role played by the signature in performativity, as noted by Jacques Derrida.[41]

We might legitimately wonder about the relationship between propositions such as these and Conceptual art. Take, for example, *Instruction Paintings* by Yoko Ono, exhibited in 1961 in AG Gallery in New York, or *Water Yam*, a book by George Brecht, published in 1963, containing 73 event-scores. These offer a range of linguistic definitions of a forthcoming action or event, presupposing an ideal meaning of the work, an infinite number of potential performances, and public participation. We could certainly mention Sabatier's use of administrative procedures (the data sheet[42]), of language to negate the visual nature of the artwork (the performative utterance replacing the projection of the film), his critique of reification (destruction of the film), his legal contract binding the work to its reception (Lettrist

certification), and the importance that reception and even participation by the viewer (the imaginary or infinitesimal dimension) holds for him. And yet it is hard to see anything other than mere similarities. Roland Sabatier's artistic logic is underpinned by a close reading of the writings of Isidore Isou, and he develops their axiomatic propositions with great originality. His art is careful to distance itself from any return to Dadaism and the historical avant-garde through a renewed, methodical and systematic revisiting of their concepts, and from a particular creativity reluctant to embrace chance, or indeterminacy. And herein lies the twin challenge to Lettrism, which is isolated and entrenched in the writing of its own history and which suffers from the silence and lack of understanding with which its works are often, and occasionally unjustly, met. In this respect, the performative dimension, in my view, is likely to offer a fresh insight into a number of Lettrist artistic activities, particularly in the domain of film, but also in publishing: the administrative use of archives, a predilection for manifestoes and the use of invective and insults.

The artist does not lay claim to the performative, and yet it affords insight into the internal logic of his films. His cinema frequently presupposes the activation of a script. However, its relationship with failure is not entirely clear. This tricky question is central to Austin's ideas and is the subject of at least three lectures in his book. A performative can fail if certain conditions are not met: relevant context, appropriate interlocutors, felicity conditions.

> There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances.[43]

If these conditions are not met, the performative utterance is deemed infelicitous, in terms of Austin's detailed account. If we look at his earlier works, we can see that they too must obey a certain number of conditions if they are to be felicitous. A context, such as an invitation to an event or a festival, is always presupposed. Referring to *Hommage à Buñuel*, Sabatier said:

> We dedicated this session to Langlois, director of the Cinémathèque française. If you are sitting in front of a big screen and you do not show a film, and you show something other than a film, it then has to be an anti-film. That was kind of the idea I started with. But things are not quite so simple when you show it in a gallery. That is why I stuck with cinema.[44]

The cinema theater seems to be a necessary pre-condition for the performative to succeed. "What I did was based on this text," he said about a second script read during the performance.

> I kept it short because I felt that people were getting restless. I gave a quick summary because I knew that it did not need go on for too long.[45]

The felicity conditions for performativity are clearly not always met. According to Austin, seriousness is also a precondition for successful performatives. If a performative utterance is to succeed in this instance, it requires a context that issues an invitation, a cinema theater, and spectators who are alert to what the experience requires of them. Conditions such as these are apparently rarely fulfilled. Likewise, quite apart from their incidental nature, the technical accidents that occurred during the event (roll of film lost by a laboratory, text illegible due to clumsy filming) offer an insight into further impediments to the success of the performative. So should the work actually be executed? Strictly speaking, is not the data sheet the performative film itself? Sabatier's cinema is located at the interface of two tendencies. On the one hand, it presents itself as a purely linguistic, virtually conceptual utterance, and yet leaves open its potential activation. The fact that few performances have actually taken place could, of course, be attributed to a number of factors. The work was carried out on a shoestring. Technical accidents are a symptom of extreme poverty. The fact that these works were not performed can also be attributed to institutional and, dare I say, sociological constraints. The conditions for a performative utterance presuppose, according to Pierre Bourdieu, the "effects of symbolic domination."[46] The place of Lettrism in the history

of art can be analyzed through this prism. And yet I believe that the possibility of failure creates a promising experimental and participatory opening for the project, allowing it to fulfill its vocation of being a "film of the future." The very possibility of failure means that the script can remain an open, labile utterance, on the threshold of film and reality, offering "white surfaces, brief injunctions, concealed spaces, and, ultimately, everything or nothing" promoting, in the artist's own words, "the power of a space beyond reality where reality is not possible, will never exist and cannot even be imagined—*unimaginable*, in a sense, rather than imaginary."[47]

The proposition, rhetorically speaking, lies at the heart of Roland Sabatier's cinema. Some of his projects, described in the data sheets for his *Œuvres de cinema* as fully-fledged films, are only linked to cinema by the slenderest of imperceptible threads and, as a veritable performative tour de force, exemplify the medium's twin movement toward expansion and contraction. Pavle Levi has noted the extent to which Lettrist film works frequently presuppose an idealistic approach to cinema taking no account of its dialectical relationship with its cinematographic apparatus, and has described in detail the technical affinities between them.[48] To what extent can cinema be exhibited, and participate in its self-abolition? How effective is an injunction? These are the questions currently raised by the exhibition of cinema, in the rhetorical sense of the word, questions which are reflected in the film practice of Roland Sabatier, a long-neglected figure in the history of cinema, due to his discreet/discrete (words favored by the artist) nature, both in the sense of circumspect and distinctive.

[1] We could mention, among others: Matthias Michalka (ed.), *X-Screen. Film Installations and Actions in the 1960s and 1970s*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna 2004; Steven Ball, David Curtis, A. L. Rees, Duncan White (eds.), *Expanded Cinema*, Tate Publishing, London 2011; Gertrud Koch, Volker Pantenburg, Simon Rothöhler (eds.), *Screen Dynamics. Mapping the Borders of Cinema*, Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Vienna 2012; *Décadrages*, no. 21–22, special issue "Cinéma élargi," Lausanne 2012.

[2] Jonathan Walley, "The Material of Film and the Idea of Cinema: Contrasting Practices in Sixties and Seventies Avant-Garde Film," *October*, no.103, 2003, p. 15–30. Cf. also, by the same author, "Identity Crisis: Experimental Film and Artistic Expansion," *October*, no. 137, 2011, p. 23–50.

[3] Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means*, Oxford University Press, New York 2012.

[4] Jean-Christophe Royoux was undoubtedly one of the first critics to use the expression "cinéma d'exposition". Cf. "Pour un cinéma d'exposition. Retour sur quelques jalons historiques," *Omnibus*, no. 20, April 1997, p. 11–12; "Cinéma d'exposition: l'espacement de la durée", *artpress*, no. 262, November 2000, p. 36–41.

[5] Cf. Guillaume Basquin, *Fondu au noir*, Paris Expérimental, Paris 2013.

[6] See my own article "De la conférence comme film," *Décadrages*, no. 21–22, p. 28–37. See also Jean Bresch and Christian Merlhiot (eds.), *La Fabrique des films*, Poli Éditions, Paris 2012.

[7] John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, Clarendon, Oxford 1962.

[8] Isidore Isou, "Esthétique du cinema" [1952], *Ion*, Paris, reed. J.-P. Rocher, Paris 1999. Cf. Frédérique Devaux, *Le Cinéma lettriste*, Paris Expérimental, Paris 1992. See also Andrew V. Uroskie, "Beyond the Black Box: The Lettrist Cinema of Disjunction", *October*, no. 135, 2011, p. 21–48.

[9] Maurice Lemaître, *Le film est déjà commencé?*, Éditions André Bonne, Paris 1952.

[10] Cf. Isidore Isou, *Introduction à l'esthétique imaginaire et autres écrits*, Cahiers de l'Externité, Paris 1999.

[11] Isidore Isou, "Esthétique du cinema," p. 152.

[12] Isidore Isou, "Manifeste de la polythanasie esthétique," preface to *La Loi des purs*, Pantin, published by the author, 1963, p. 8.

[13] Ibid., p. 7.

[14] Roland Sabatier, *Situation de mes apports dans la polythanasie esthétique*, Publications Psi, Paris 1974, p. 2.

[15] Roland Sabatier, *Œuvres de cinéma (1963-1983)*, Publications Psi, Paris 1984. Preface by Frédérique Devaux, "Roland Sabatier: De la reproduction à la représentation ou le cinéma en limite du cinéma." A copy is available for consultation at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

[16] After being enrolled as a doctoral student for ten years, Roland Sabatier chose not to submit his thesis, despite having qualified to do so.

[17] On-line introduction to Éditions Psi: www.lecointredrouet.com/lettrisme/psi.html.

[18] Cf. Fabrice Flahutez, *Le Lettrisme historique était une avant-garde*, Les presses du réel, Dijon 2011.

[19] Roland Sabatier, "L'anti-cinéma lettriste: le cinéma sans le cinéma", in *L'anti-cinéma lettriste 1952–2009*, catalogue, Zero Gravità, Sordevolo 2009, p. 54.

[20] Édouard Levé, *Œuvres*, P.O.L, Paris 2002, p. 7.

[21] Cf. Érik Bullot, "Film papier," *Cahiers du post-diplôme* Document et art contemporain, no. 3, École européenne supérieure de l'image, Poitiers-Angoulême 2013, p. 24–27; Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means*, p. 46–76.

[22] Conversation with the author, Paris, April 16, 2013.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Stephen Wright, "Visibilités spécifiques," *Cahiers du post-diplôme*, no. 3, p. 30.

[25] *Œuvres de cinéma (1963-1983)*, p. 29.

[26] Document provided by the artist.

[27] Roland Sabatier, *Trois films sur le thème du cinéma. "Regarde ma parole qui parle le (du) cinéma. 1982," "Quelque part dans le cinéma. 1982," "Une (certaine) image du cinéma. 1983,"* Paris, Psi, 1983, p. 13.

[28] Ibid., p. 25.

[29] Conversation with the author, Paris, April 16, 2013.

[30] Roland Sabatier, *Trois films sur le thème du cinéma*, p. 27.

[31] Cf. Gérard Bermond, "Le cinéma sur le mode de ne l'être pas de Roland Sabatier," in Christian Lebrat and Nicole Brenez (eds.), *Jeune, dure et pure! Une histoire du cinéma d'avant-garde et expérimental en France*, Cinémathèque Française/Mazzotta, Paris/Milan 2001, p. 204–206.

[32] Cf. Helio Oiticica, *Quasi-Cinemas*, Kölnisher Kunstverein, New Museum of Contemporary Art, Wexner Center for the Arts, 2001.

[33] Roland Sabatier, *Trois films sur le thème du cinéma*, p. 33.

[34] Roland Sabatier, *Œuvres de cinéma (1963–1983)*, p. 60.

[35] Take, for example, the cover of *Zebar*, no. 56, May 2006, or *L'Anti-cinéma lettriste*, p. 96–97. Other elements from this set of objects were exhibited in a display case when he had a solo show at the Galerie Artcade, Nice, from September 17 to October 20, 1992.

[36] Roland Sabatier, *Œuvres infinitésimales et supertemporelles, injonctions, faits, comportements*, Éditions Psi, Paris 1984. Unpaginated introduction. Copy available at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Roland Sabatier, *Œuvres de cinéma*, p. 24.

[40] John L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, p. 62–63.

[41] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Événement Contexte" [1971], in *Limited Inc.*, Galilée, Paris 1990, p. 17–51.

[42] Take, for example, Roland Sabatier's injunction: "Filling in an administrative form is an infinitesimally bureaucratic piece of work" (1969).

[43] John L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, p. 49.

[44] Conversation with the author, Paris, April 16, 2013.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire*, Fayard, Paris 1982.

[47] Roland Sabatier, "L'anti-cinéma lettriste: le cinéma sans le cinema," p. 58.

[48] Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means*, p. 93.